

## She Lay There on Red Velvet

by Kelsey Jones

Wails didn't echo off the walls, and it wasn't old and smelly as I had thought it would be. In fact, the funeral parlor had a calm, cool atmosphere. Industrial blue carpet lay across a cement floor, and pale blue shades guarded two leaded floor-length windows. I despised the room.

Milling about, my aunts, uncles, grandparents, and twenty-second cousins gawked at me, "Grandma's poor little granddaughter," as if I were a lonely ladybug in a glass jar. Ladies in silks and ruffles pranced around gossiping, their four-inch heels clicking time with each syllable. Then, of course, there were the husbands. They wiped sweaty hands on denim overalls and wore baseball caps advertising tractor companies. Gulping lemonade, the menfolk drawled on about their "heifers and hogs." I wanted those insufferable people to quiet down and remember her. She was my great-grandmother, not any old dead acquaintance!

All afternoon I had been with her, clenching the rim of her coffin until my knuckles throbbed. My eyes were dry, the lashes scratching them like bristles against a dishpan. Bowls of flowers decorated various stools around the room. "More flowers than she ever got when she was alive!" I muttered bitterly.

I reached out and tickled a daisy, remembering similar flowers of another day. Lying down, I'd stared sleepily into a field of young, green hay. T.C.'s velvet dog ears flapped against my face; the air felt warm and sweet. My canine friend raised his snout to the "farmy" smells of straw and Holsteins. Then I saw Grandma, all fuzzy and warm. She was floating in a sea of grass, treading heat waves and carrying a wicker basket overflowing with yellow fluffs of feathers. Carefully, as if unsheathing some rare jewel, or pointing out a vein of gold on a map, she unveiled the

newly hatched chicks. Their eyes were trusting, beady, and bright as they looked questioningly at us. I grazed their wings with my pinkie finger and beckoned them toward me. Then Grandma and I wasted the day away, savoring the perfumes sifting lazily through the summer trees. Opening her hands to catch the twilight,

Grandma looked like a little girl. Set against purple stars and shimmering fireflies, she lifted me onto a bale of hay and sang the moon to sleep. I didn't know then that the sky was any bigger than Grandma's farm.

I needed air. The metal doorknob had been soak-

ing up heat, and it singed my fingertips. Outside, the sun, like a giant tongue, left beads of sweat on my forehead. Goosebumps prickled all over my skin until sun and sweat melted them away. Dark nylons clung to my calves. I had come out here for one cool sip of air, but every breath was like drawing syrup through a straw.

All at once my carefully composed face fell apart. Tears gushed, running in rivulets down my cheeks. It was then that I crumpled, when I knew she was gone.

The potpourri I made from her roses still veils me with her love. "Isn't it wonderful, Grandma?" I often breathe. But she is gone. Oh, she's gone. ★

## Second Daddy

Learning to drive that Buick Regal droned on as the longest summer of my twelve, almost thirteen years.

He rested his huge, grease-stained hand on my nervous knee as we mounted Peppermill Road offa Highway 421.

"Now, don't ever let no boy take you up this way, OK?" he had advised with a smirk.

Then why was he taking me up here where no cars was while Mama was back at his rat-hole trailer waiting for me to get back from my "driving lesson"?

Don't know why I stood his wanderin' hands 'cept maybe it had something to do with my own daddy being two, three states away or maybe I stood it just to learn how to drive good enough to get the hell away. Funny how I didn't see the whole thing then.

I waited around and let it build up to October two years ago

when he met me outside the shower, the worse thing being Mama not believing much of any of it

and my boyfriend not making it feel any better.

'Stead I just sat on it all,

making up fancy pictures of my real daddy picking me up in a nice Ford or something, driving down 421 telling me nice stuff

'bout the women in the Bible or his dead brother.

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